DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 596 CE 062 498

TITLE	Taming Your Time.
INSTITUTION	Mercer County Community Coll., Trenton, N.J.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC. National Workplace Literacy Program.
PUB DATE	92
CONTRACT	V198A10206
NOTE	25p.; For related documents, see CE 062 480-501.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Instructional Materials (For Learner) (051)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Adult Literacy; Daily Living Skills; Efficiency; *Employment Potential; *Job Skills; Literacy Education; Planning; *Skill Development; *Time Management
IDENTIFIERS	*Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

This document is one of a series of student workbooks developed for workplace skill development courses or workshops by Mercer County Community College (New Jersey) and its partners. Designed to help employees improve their use of time on the job, this time management course explains how to establish priorities and control time usage. The materials for the 3-hour course include a course outline, objectives, a topical outline, and the following information sheets: control of time, self-assessment inventory for improving time management, setting priorities, establishing priorities, essentials of planning, prime time, external and internal time wasters, self-generated time wasters, using time productively, 10 ways to slow down and gain time, quiet time, and managing a heavy workload. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED351596

TAMING YOUR TIME

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Prepared Under a United States Department of Education
National Workplace Literacy Program Grant to
MERCER COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Center for Training and Development
1200 Old Trenton Road
Trenton, NJ 08690

Elaine S. Weinberg
Director, Workplace Skills Project

CE062498

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

OVERVIEW OF WORKPLACE LITERACY PROJECT
Skills for Tomorrow, NOW

The Workplace Literacy Project resulted from a Department of Education grant, plus in-kind contributions from a partnership with General Motors Inland Fisher Guide Plant, Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, and St. Francis Medical Center. The project is an attempt to find solutions to the growing "skills gap" in industry today. More than 25 million Americans cannot read the front page of a newspaper. In addition, workers whose average ages are rising, must produce in a technological environment that may not have existed when they began working. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to compete in a technologically changing workplace. Moreover, an increasing number of immigrants have entered the workforce with limited English communication skills. In response to this growing need, the Federal government provided a grant to Mercer County Community College and its partners to develop ways to enrich and expand employees' basic workplace knowledge. The aim of the project was also to improve the self-esteem of the participants.

Support for the project was solicited from all levels of company management and the unions. In addition, an advisory council, comprising key management and employees from each company determined the design, goals, and time-frame of the project. Each company provided a liaison person from their site, and MCCC hired a director to manage the program. Employee release time for classes was site-specific.

Participation in the program was voluntary. Information about classes was disseminated through company letters, flyers, union notices, notices included with paychecks, and open forums with supervisors and employees.

The ABLE test was used for normative pre and post testing. Other types of evaluations varied from course to course. MCCC counselors met with each student to discuss present and future educational objectives.

Courses were offered in reading, business writing, math, science, and English as a Second Language. In addition, there were workshops in problem solving, stress management, and other work survival skills. The curricula for the courses were customized for each worksite to be as job focused as possible.

It is our hope that this program will serve as a model for other organizations to empower their employees with the skills needed to succeed in the changing technological workplace, today and in the future.

COURSE OUTLINE

TAMING YOUR TIME

Explains how to improve the individual's use of time on the job. Emphasis is on establishing priorities.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify tasks that should take priority for being completed within a given work period
- Establish priorities for the day and for the week
- Establish a plan for completing assignments
- Identify ways to reduce external and internal time wasters
- Identify ways to use time productively

TOPICAL OUTLINE

- What controls your time?
- Inventory for improving time management
- Establish priorities for completing tasks
  - find out what tasks and results are most important to you and your employer
  - start establishing priorities
  - major considerations in setting priorities
- Essentials of planning
- Time wasters
- Using time productively

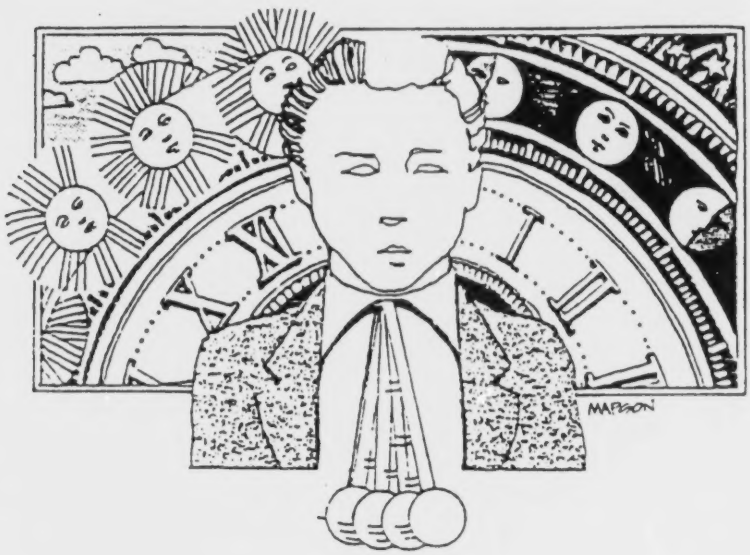
OTHER

- 3 hours

WHAT CONTROLS YOUR TIME?

The best starting place to improve your use of time is to determine the extent to which you control the time available to you. No one has total control over a daily schedule. Someone or something will always make demands. However, everyone has some control, and probably more than they realize.

Some time is ("working hours") regulated and should be used for those activities. Even within this structured time, there are opportunities to select which tasks or activities to handle and what priority to assign to that task. It is the exercise of these discretionary choices that allow you to control your time.



SELF ASSESSMENT INVENTORY FOR IMPROVING TIME MANAGEMENT

Instructions: Read each item, then check the column opposite each statement that best describes the frequency with which you participate in the activity mentioned. Work quickly. First impressions are usually quite accurate.

	Most of the Time	Quite Often	Some-times	Rarely or Never
1. I am able to control my own time and the way I use it.				
2. I am able to prevent interruptions from my co-workers.				
3. I avoid interrupting my co-workers unnecessarily.				
4. I deal with my incoming work quickly and efficiently.				
5. I am able to avoid telephone interruptions when I need to.				
6. I return telephone messages promptly.				
7. I do not waste time because of poorly designed systems in the organization.				
8. I stick to the tasks assigned and avoid spending time doing "busy work."				
9. I make appointments with people I need to talk to, both inside and outside the organization.				
10. I try not to attend low priority meetings that will take up a lot of my time.				
11. I try not to let my work accumulate in piles on my desk, by the phone, etc.				
12. I do not procrastinate and I complete my work on time.				
13. I delegate what work I can and should to others.				
14. I make a list of prioritized tasks to be accomplished.				
15. I set reasonable objectives with specific time limits for completion.				
16. I accomplish my responsibilities on time.				
17. I accomplish my work within normal working hours.				
18. I stop to consider if I am working on the right thing, in the right way, right now.				

In establishing priorities, first:

FIND OUT WHAT TASKS AND RESULTS ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYER

Because you can't do everything at once, you need to make decisions about what to do first, second, and so on, and what can wait for later.

If you don't stop and set priorities, they set themselves. Some of the inefficient ways priorities get set:

"Squeaky wheel gets the grease" approach--who ever bugs you the most gets your time.

"Last in, first out" approach--whatever task has been requested most recently.

"Do what I like best" approach--whatever you enjoy the most gets done first.

All approaches have one major problem--really important work may not be getting done. While it takes planning to determine order of importance for tasks, the payoff is worth it.

You have the satisfaction of knowing you've applied your best efforts to areas where results really count.

You help your boss and your coworkers realize the responsibilities you are juggling. They can help you avoid conflicting priorities when they are aware of what expectations others have of you.

MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS IN SETTING PRIORITIES

Identifying the priority of job tasks should not be the result of an administrative assistant's likes or dislikes. Rather, it is based on the elements of time and importance. Lillian H. Chaney has identified several considerations which should be used to establish the priority of work:

1. How soon is the material needed? An agenda for a meeting to be held later in the day obviously takes priority over typing a report which is schedules to go out within a week.

2. Are other people involved? If so, are there deadlines to be met? When others are involved, it is helpful to find out the approximate length of time required by each to avoid last-minute delay.

3. How long will the job take? Completion time for transcribing dictation may be easier to estimate than composing assignments.

4. Can similar activities be grouped and time saved by handling them together? Copying and duplicating projects can often be grouped as can errands outside the office.

5. Which of the projects, if any require employer consultation? When will the employer be available Make a list of questions to avoid repeated queries and interruptions.

6. Can the job be delegated? Is anyone available? If there are a large number of delegable tasks and no one to whom they may be assigned, mention this to the employer so that this will be a consideration in future hirings.

7. What is the most efficient way of getting the job done? A few changes on a report should not necessitate retyping it in its entirety. Cutting, pasting, and photocopying will make quick work of the job. Answer memos right on the original when appropriate.

START ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

Clarify with your boss, what duties your job includes. Be sure to include not only what your boss expects of you, but also the expectations of coworkers and perhaps even people in other departments. With your boss, decide while tasks are most (and least) important to your job.

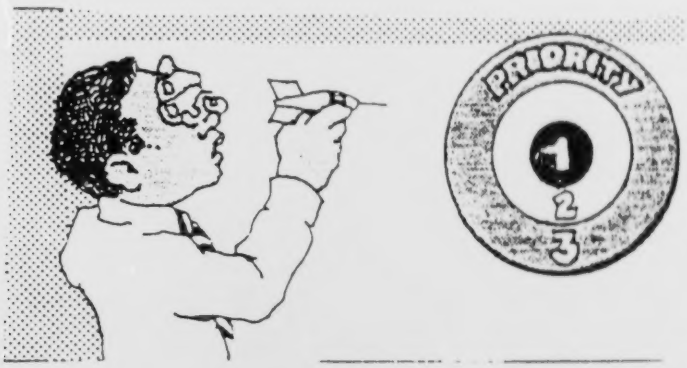
Prepare questions before talking with people, ask:

What things are important for them to receive
In what priority order
On what time schedule
With what quality

Whenever a new request comes your way, try to get an idea on how important it is in comparison with your other duties. If doing one task now means putting off another task until later, be sure that whoever is affected by your decision is informed and agrees.

On occasion you may find that two people or more are asking you to do different things at the same time, and you can't see a way to meet the needs of both. When these kinds of conflicting priorities arise, it is best if you ask the different people to get together, discuss their needs, and work out a solution.

You need to set up a clear picture of what has to be done when.



Establishing priorities in the use of time is a two-step process:

1. Listing the things that need to be done.
2. Prioritizing items on the list.

Use the ABC method to determine your priorities once you understand your boss's expectations. Place each item on your list into one of the following categories:

*Priority A--"Must do": These are the critical items. Some may fall in this category because of management directives, important customer requirements, significant deadlines, or opportunities for success or advancement.

*Priority B--"Should do": These are items of medium value. Items in this category may contribute to improved performance but are not essential or do not have critical deadlines.

*Priority C--"Nice-to-do": This is the lowest value category. While interesting or fun, they could be eliminated, postponed, or scheduled for slack periods.

Your A's, B's, and C's are flexible depending on the date your list is prepared. Priorities change over time. Today's B's may be tomorrow's "A" as an important deadline approaches. Likewise, today's "A" may become tomorrow's "C," if it did not get accomplished in time and/or circumstances change.

Obviously, it is not worthwhile to spend considerable time on a task of modest value. On the other hand, a project of high value is worth the time invested. Only good planning will allow you to reap the benefits of time wisely invested.

MY PRIORITIES FOR THE DAY

Priority A--Must Do

Priority B--Should Do

Priority C--Nice To Do

MY PRIORITIES FOR THE WEEK

Priority A--Must Do

Priority B--Should Do

Priority C--Nice To Do

ESSENTIALS OF PLANNING

Finding the answer to Why, What, When, How, Who, and Where is vital to good planning:

WHY... is the project being done: purposes, values, scope, and objectives.

WHAT... is the project: what is to be accomplished and what is required to do it.

WHEN... is the project to be done: day and hour deadlines.

HOW... shall the project be accomplished: best methods and tools.

WHO... is involved: administrative and supervisory channels.

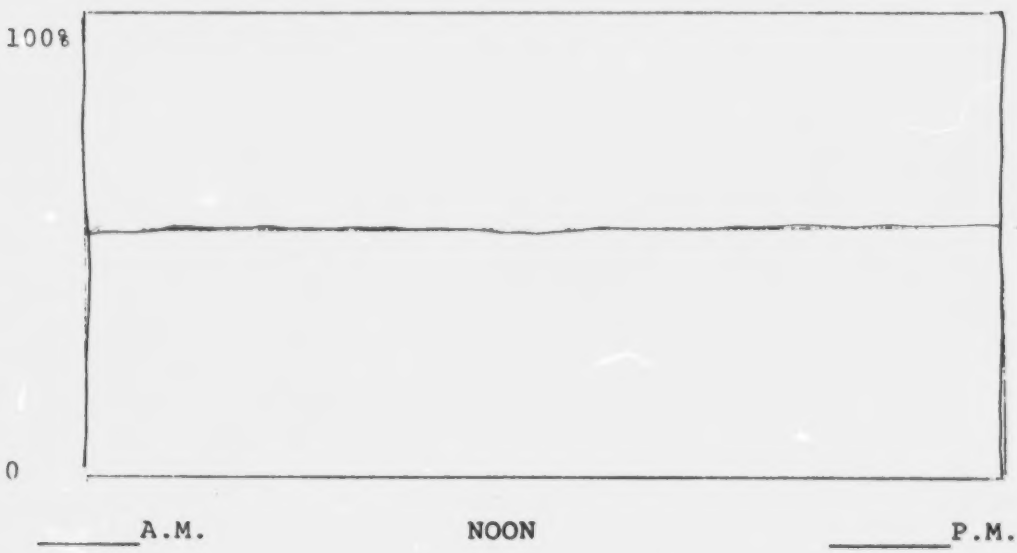
WHERE... is the project to be done: provisions for space.

PRIME TIME

When considering a daily schedule, it's a good idea to keep your energy cycle in mind. Some people are at their best early in the morning. Others peak in the afternoon. Whenever possible, try to plan your daily schedule to match your "prime time." You will not always have control but consider such ideas as reading, responding to mail, or returning phone calls after lunch if your "prime time" is in the morning.

CHART YOUR ENERGY CYCLE

Fill in the beginning and ending time of your day on the following diagram. Then draw a line through the day reflecting your typical energy cycle.



1. Do you arrange your workday to take advantage of your energy cycle?

2. What could you do differently to better utilize your period of peak energy?

EXTERNAL & INTERNAL TIME WASTERS

Select the things that interfere with your ability to get the job done. Add any that do not appear in the listing, Place a check mark next to the ones.

1. External Time Wasters

Which of the following are not of your job responsibility or are thwarting your own time management because you have no control over them?

	INTERFERENCE YES	NO
socializing in the office		
telephone interruptions		
too many meetings		
personal interruptions		
work conditions		
ineffective systems		
incomplete information presented for problem solving		
being understaffed		
unclear objectives established by superiors		
short, unrealistic deadlines		
employees with personal problems		
trying to get others' cooperation		
unscheduled visitors		
too much travel		
too much trivia		
poor filing system		
getting others to meet deadlines		
deficiency of managerial tools or personnel		
poor paperwork flow system		
unnecessary memo writing		
scattered responsibility for many projects		
poor communication		
too much time spent on crises caused by others		
motivating others		
long commutes		
not being properly organized so routine tasks take too long		
not using a "TO DO" list, no objective		
making errors in your work		
skipping from one tasks to another		
not being decisive		
office equipment that doesn't work or is out of date		
"Bureaucratic red tape"		
other		

2. Personal Time Wasters

Which of the following are rendering you ineffective in your own time management?

	INTERFERENCE YES	NO
lack of planning		
lack of priorities		
overcommitment		
negative procrastination		
indecision or postponed meetings		
shuffling paper		
slow reading skills		
failure to delegate		
slow starting		
lack of self-discipline		
inconsistent actions		
snap decisions		
confusion caused by mass of postponed work		
lack of self-motivation		
uncertainty about how to proceed or take action		
physical or mental exhaustion		
a boss that doesn't keep you informed		
instructions that are not clear or misleading		
having a messy desk or work area		
day dreaming		
not being able to say "NO" when you should		
being interrupted by your boss		
having a disorganized boss		
no clear, organized office procedures		
too much managing of your job by your boss		
other		

3. How can you control or eliminate your own time wasters?

SELF-GENERATED TIME WASTERS

DISORGANIZATION: Disorganization is a key culprit for wasted time. Evidence of disorganization shows up in the layout of a work area. If time is spent searching for misplaced item; or wasted due to distractions which cause you to start and stop several times before a task is completed then you need to evaluate your work area.

Focus on your desk. Is your work area cluttered? "A place for everything and everything in its place," is the best advice for organizing information you need.

Finally, organize your approach to work. Practice completing your tasks. If interrupted, do not immediately jump to a new task. First, assess the priority of a request, and avoid getting involved in any new activity until it becomes top priority. If an interruption comes by phone or personal visit, simply return to the task you were working on as soon as the interruption ends.

PROCRASTINATION: We all put things off. Typically, these items include boring, difficult, unpleasant, or onerous tasks that ultimately need completing. When this happens to you, consider the following ideas:

* Set a deadline to complete the task and stick to it.
* Build in a reward system. For example, tell yourself" "When I finish that task I'm going to enjoy a nice meal with my special other." "Or, I won't go home until I finish this task."
* Arrange with someone (an associate, secretary, etc.) to routinely follow up with you about progress on tasks you tend to put off.
* Do undesirable tasks early in the day so you can be done with them.

Dealing With Procrastination

____ Set a deadline.

____ Set up a reward system.

____ Arrange for follow-up

____ Do it first

____ Break job into small pieces

INABILITY TO SAY "NO": At some point, we all have demands on our time which exceed our ability to accommodate them. Here is where learning to say "No" will come to the rescue. When you take on more than you can handle, your quality will suffer and you are better off to take on only what you can comfortably handle.

Saying "No" doesn't need to offend. One approach is to offer an alternative. Rather than saying "Yes" too often, try some of the following responses:

*"I can take care of that but what I'm doing now will be delayed. Is your request more important?"

*"I'll be glad to handle that for you. However, I can't get to it until I finish what I'm doing. That will be ..."

*"I'm sorry I don't have time to take on any new work. I'll call you when my schedule frees up."

*"I appreciate your vote of confidence but just can't work it into my schedule at this time. Sorry."

*"I'm sorry, I just can't do it. Have you considered asking..."

LACK OF INTEREST (ATTITUDE): If you waste time simply because of a lack of interest you should investigate alternatives that may be open to you. Some ideas are:

*Consider ways to make your work more interesting.

*See if you can swap tasks with a co-worker for better variety.

*Ask about reorganizing your work or sharing it.

*Reread the suggestions under procrastination.

CASE STUDY: ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE

It was 7:20 a.m. when Marion arrived at the office. She was early because she wanted to clear the backlog of work that had been piling up on her desk. She turned on the lights and started to go through yesterday's mail. As she read the first piece, she realized she couldn't deal with it until a colleague arrived. She set it aside and went to the next. This item had potential application to a project she was working on, so she walked down the hall and made a copy for her personal use.

As she continued reading her mail she came across a journal article of particular interest and became engrossed in it. She was startled to find as she looked up that others were arriving and it was nearly 9:00 o'clock.

She quickly pushed the remaining mail to a corner of her desk and reached for a project file due tomorrow with at least two days' worth yet to be completed. As she opened the file, Bill and Claire stopped by and invited her to join them for coffee. Marion decided she could spare ten minutes. Bill and Claire were both anxious to share the details of a play they attended last night. Before Marion realized it, thirty minutes had passed and she hurried back to her office.

As Marion entered her office, the phone rang. It was Mr. Wilson, her manager. There was a meeting scheduled at 10:00. Could Marion sit in for him? There was something to be discussed that the department should know about. Marion looked at her watch. There wasn't enough time to get started on the project so she pushed the file aside and vowed to start it immediately after lunch.

The afternoon wasn't any better. A few visitors, a few phone calls, a couple of letters, and the day was over. Nothing had been accomplished on the project that was due tomorrow. As she stuffed papers into her briefcase, she wondered how Bill and Claire were able to attend plays during the evening.

Examine Marion's use of time:

1. Did she make good use of prime time? _____
2. Was she working on her highest priority task? _____
3. Did she seem able to say "No"? _____
4. Did she practice task completion? _____
5. Does she seem to understand her problem? _____

USING TIME PRODUCTIVELY

Ten useful tips on effective time management:

1. Consolidate similar tasks.
2. Tackle tough jobs first.
3. Delegate work and develop others.
4. Learn to use idle time.
5. Get control of the paper flow.
6. Avoid the cluttered-desk syndrome.
7. Get started immediately on important tasks.
8. Reduce meeting time.
9. Take time to plan.
10. Learn to say "no."

By applying the ten tips listed above, we can use our time far more productively. This in turn will help us cope with overly stressful situations that place undue physical or psychological demands on us. Along with interpersonal problems, either at home or at work, time management problems have been identified as a major source of stress. By adopting time management and establishing priorities, we can learn to control the sources of stress more effectively. Also, for our own increased effectiveness and personal well-being, we should work toward identifying those personal and organizational goals that will provide balance in our daily lives.

Ten Ways To Slow Down And Gain Time

"Feeling rushed is one of the major contributors to stress at work, which we feel is the No. 1 problem in America today."
-Dr. Paul J. Rosch,
President, American
Institute of Stress
Yonkers, N.Y.

Since time is life, anything that contributes to or serves to enhance your health is good time management.

Feeling harried and hurried due to time pressures can generate harmful stress and tension.

If you feel rushed, whether on the job or at home, slow down to gain time and get more out of your life. Specifically, here are 10 ways to reduce strain and make more healthful use of your time:

1. Take breaks. Don't do any single thing, in the same place, for long periods. Alter your position. Go for a walk. Change the pace of what you're doing.

2. Switch tasks from time to time. Do something mental for awhile then change to a physical activity and vice versa.

3. Think "effectiveness" not "efficiency." Focus your attention and effort on doing the right tasks well, based on your objectives and priorities. Avoid the "busyness trap." Always make the best use of your time in terms of the payoff. It makes no sense to spend $50 worth of your time to get a $2.98 return.

4. Delegate as much as you can to others. Only do what's in your best interest to do, as it fits into the general routine. Before starting a job, ask yourself, "Is this work really necessary and must I do it?"

5. Break big tasks into small parts which can be completed in phases. Rest up between phases, as your body tells you (when apathy, boredom, fatigue, irritability, or the like begins to set in).

6. Take some time for yourself. Time to exercise, to play, to think, to plan, and so forth. Strive for the right balance among work, play, and love.

7. Work smarter, not harder. Look constantly for shortcuts and ways to streamline what you do and how you do it. Never get in the "this is the way I (or we) have always done it" rut. A fact of life is that there's always a better way to do things.

8. Make your prime time work for you and not against you. Know the time when you're at your best mentally and physically--morning, afternoon, or evening. Also, know the time you feel most comfortable dealing with people. Try to concentrate the time you work best on important tasks; i.e., those projects that require creativity, deep thought, and imagination. Use the time you like working with people to interact with others. Do such things as make telephone calls, attend meetings, see visitors, etc.

9. Adapt to your environment and situation. Recognize that you cannot control everything. When you're faced with something beyond your influence, say the prayer of serenity:
   God, grant me the serenity
   To accept the things I cannot change
   The courage to change the things I can
   And the wisdom to know the difference.

10. Get away for awhile. Take a minimum of a week off from your job at least once a year (and a day off here and there throughout the year).

quiet time

Reprinted from
"The Personnel Administrator"

Merrill E. Douglass and
Donna N. Douglass

Quiet Time Increases Productivity

Most people who work in offices find their days hectic, fragmented and generally frustrating. They have numerous important things to do, but an endless stream of interruptions makes it difficult to complete them. The constant start-and-stop-and-restart pattern stretches jobs out longer than necessary and often reduces the quality of performance. It is reasonable to guess that these interruptions partially explain the findings of three independent surveys last year which found that the average office worker wastes 45 percent of the day. Incredible! We seem to accomplish about half of what we should be able to accomplish with a working day.

Of the many ideas advanced to solve this problem, one of the simplest and most effective steps is often ignored. A good quiet time policy could be a useful effort toward recovering part of that lost time. It is easy to do and costs nothing.

What, exactly, is "Quiet Time"? The concept of quiet time means time is set aside during which only emergency interruptions are allowed. Messages are taken so telephone calls can be returned later. Regular callers can be asked to call after the quiet time. No meetings are scheduled. People are not wandering around chatting with others. Particularly distracting jobs, such as running ditto machines, are delayed until later. The objective of a quiet hour is simple: create an uninterrupted block of time so people can concentrate on an important task.

What do people actually do during their quiet time? They think. They plan. They get organized. They are commonly observed doing analytical jobs, writing reports, or working on tasks which require creative skills. In general, the biggest gain seems to be finishing a task within the quiet hour which would otherwise take perhaps two or three hours to complete.

Many people assume that finding a quiet time is impossible. They frequently claim they have an "open" office and that anyone must be free to see anyone else at any time. They'd love to have a quiet hour but claim, "It can't be done in my office!" Of course, if they believe it can't be done – it can't.

On the other hand, countless numbers have just gone ahead and implemented a quiet time. Some have waited until the point of total frustration before taking this important step. Others have realized its advantages before their office situation had totally deteriorated. In all cases, the results are the same: employees at all levels have unanimously applauded the move to a quiet time.

Individuals can, and do, implement quiet time on their own, but the greatest benefits occur when groups do it together. An entire office, department, division, or company can help make all employees successful when they observe quiet time as a unit. Everyone should be included. When everyone in the office is making a special effort to do their work quietly and not bother their co-workers, the level of internal office interruptions is greatly reduced. External interruptions are minimized where possible. The greater the number of interruptions which are eliminated during this quiet period, the more work will be successfully accomplished.

To successfully implement a quiet hour in your office, follow these 10 steps:

1. Secure firm commitment from top management of the unit concerned.
2. Explain the concept to managers and supervisors, focusing on the benefits.
3. Discuss the concept at staff meetings to develop consensus and commitment.
4. Determine what time period is most appropriate. (Most companies choose 8 to 9 a.m. This is frequently the lowest activity level anyway.)
5. Draw up operating guidelines.
6. Try a pilot project first.
7. Monitor results and solve problems as they arise.
8. Evaluate results of the pilot projects and modify policies as required.
9. Implement quiet time policy for the entire organization.
10. Keep exceptions to a minimum.

Start the wheels moving today. Plan your approach to top management and illustrate the positive value of a quiet time policy. Everyone will find this simple new procedure exactly what they need to get a stronger handle on the important work they must accomplish.□

When the job seems IMPOSSIBLE!

by Mary King

What should you do when you come to the awful, pit-in-the-stomach conclusion that you simply can't do the job you've been assigned? The abyss is at your feet; the bread line looms. You break out in a cold sweat. The hour of reckoning is near. What you really want to do is hide until the whole hideous situation goes away.

It's not likely to, however, so take a deep breath and try to think clearly.

Before taking any action, relax for a few minutes and be sure your judgment is based on reason, not panic. Double-check the assignment, and try to think of another way of attacking the job that's easier or less time-consuming. If possible, ask advice from someone who has a similar job or who has held your job in the past.

If you remain convinced the assignment is too much for you, tell your boss as soon as possible. Whether you expect understanding or anger, be sure your superior understands the situation while there's still time to make other arrangements. If you postpone the unpleasant meeting, he or she will be furious about the delay, in addition to being angry about the job not getting done.

Dealing with the problem as soon as possible will spare you a lot of tension and anguish. You may even get instant relief if the person in charge realizes he made a mistake by giving you the job in the first place. Your boss might also temporarily relieve you of some or all of your usual duties so that you can concentrate on this particular project.

If you're reluctant to confront your superior with the bad news, keep in mind that most bosses dislike surprises more than they dislike incompetence. According to a survey conducted by John Sullivan, a professor at Georgia State University, employers mention failure to make a deadline more frequently than incompetence in discussing the negative traits of workers.

How should you go about telling the bitter truth to your unsuspecting boss? Keep your focus on the most important thing—getting the job done.

A maximum of clear thinking and a minimum of panic will make the heaviest workload manageable.

Above all, express willingness to do everything within your capability. There's nothing like a liberal glob of enthusiasm to please the boss! Appear confident. This is no time for hand-wringing. Don't try to shift the blame, and save any complaints until the crisis has passed.

Once you've explained why you can't do the assignment, take the initiative and try to come up with some constructive suggestions. For example, if you're not experienced enough on the computer system to complete a complicated report involving graphs and charts in the time allotted, volunteer to do the text and the proofreading while someone else tackles the complex graphs and detailed charts. Maybe an hour or two of help from a co-worker could provide a critical boost.

Perhaps hiring a temporary worker or farming out xeroxing to a copy center will solve your problem. If you can't work the overtime, you might know someone in the company who can do the job and would love the extra money.

Even if one of your possible solutions is expensive or unorthodox, you should not hesitate to suggest it. Let your boss decide on the priority of the project.

Once the pressure is off, try to figure out why the situation came up and whether it's likely to arise again. If the incident pointed out a weakness of yours, try to correct it, even if you have to do it in your own time. Try to anticipate other troublesome situations arising in the future and make sure you have the skills and know-how to deal with them. If the crisis arose because you procrastinated when things were slow, you may now be able to correct that bad habit.

If the problem occurred because of a misunderstanding of what your job entails, talk with your boss and get the details of your responsibilities nailed down.

If you were seriously at fault in the situation, you may be in for some trouble once the crisis is over. If, for instance, you provided false information on your résumé or never signed up for required training, you may be running into rough weather. But how you handled yourself when it came to the crunch will probably determine whether you get through the storm in your career. ◆

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THERE IS ALWAYS TIME TO DO WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU.

THE DIFFICULT PART IS IN KNOWING WHAT IS IMPORTANT.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE